



The Day of Wonders

A Christmas Story

By Mabel Gertrude Rogers



Copyright, 1915, by American Press Association.

THE head nurse, thinking she heard some one sobbing, paused abruptly in the snowy path in front of the infirmary. Darkness reigned, except for the twinkling lights in the bathrooms of the low, open buildings which constituted the Clearfield sanitarium.

She listened. The sound seemed to come from the children's shack, and she turned her steps hurriedly in that direction.

"Some poor homesick kiddie," she thought. "And Christmas eve, too!"

She opened the door and then went in softly between the two rows of little white beds. She could distinguish in the dimly starlit gloom the children's Christmas tree in one corner laden with all the gifts they had received from home. Everything seemed in order. It was after 9, and the children were asleep. As she reached the other end of the tiny ward, however, she came to an empty bed.

"It's Ann Wetherly's bed," she murmured. "I wonder if she's sick."

She smoothed the tumbled bedclothing and hastened out into the hall which led to the other rooms. At the dressing room door she paused. It was slightly ajar, but she heard no sound. She pushed it open softly.

There, huddled on the only chair in the room, directly under the brilliant light, was a little heaving figure, her face buried in her hands, a blanket half covering her worn nightgown.

"Ann?" Miss Morgan spoke her name gently.

The child started and raised wide solemn eyes set in a flushed and tear stained face, then quickly turned away.

The glimpse she caught of the sorrowful face touched the instinctive mother heart of the head nurse.

"You poor little Ann!" she exclaimed softly, and, dropping on the floor beside the chair, she drew the quivering little form into her lap.

At this unlooked for tenderness the child's sobs broke forth again. Miss

"Ann," Miss Morgan coaxed, "sit up, dear, and tell me what you're crying about."

Ann made no reply.

"And on Christmas eve too?"

The little figure stiffened and looked up with indignant eyes.

"It ain't Christmas eve for me!" she burst out in shrill childish pain.

The head nurse was bewildered. "Why, it's Christmas eve for every body! And there's your pretty tree in the ward!"

"It ain't my tree," fiercely, "and there ain't one—single thing on it—for me!" Ann's words came between sobs.

"Well," Miss Morgan consoled her, "maybe Santa Claus hasn't put your gifts on yet."

"But Santa Claus is jest yer folks—and mine—never—sent even a card!"

Miss Morgan rocked back and forth as though hushing a baby.

"They may send something tomorrow," she ventured, resolving that at least tomorrow would find something on the tree bearing Ann's name.

"No, they won't. I wouldn't mind so much only—everybody else is getting things—and I don't want 'em to think my brothers don't care."

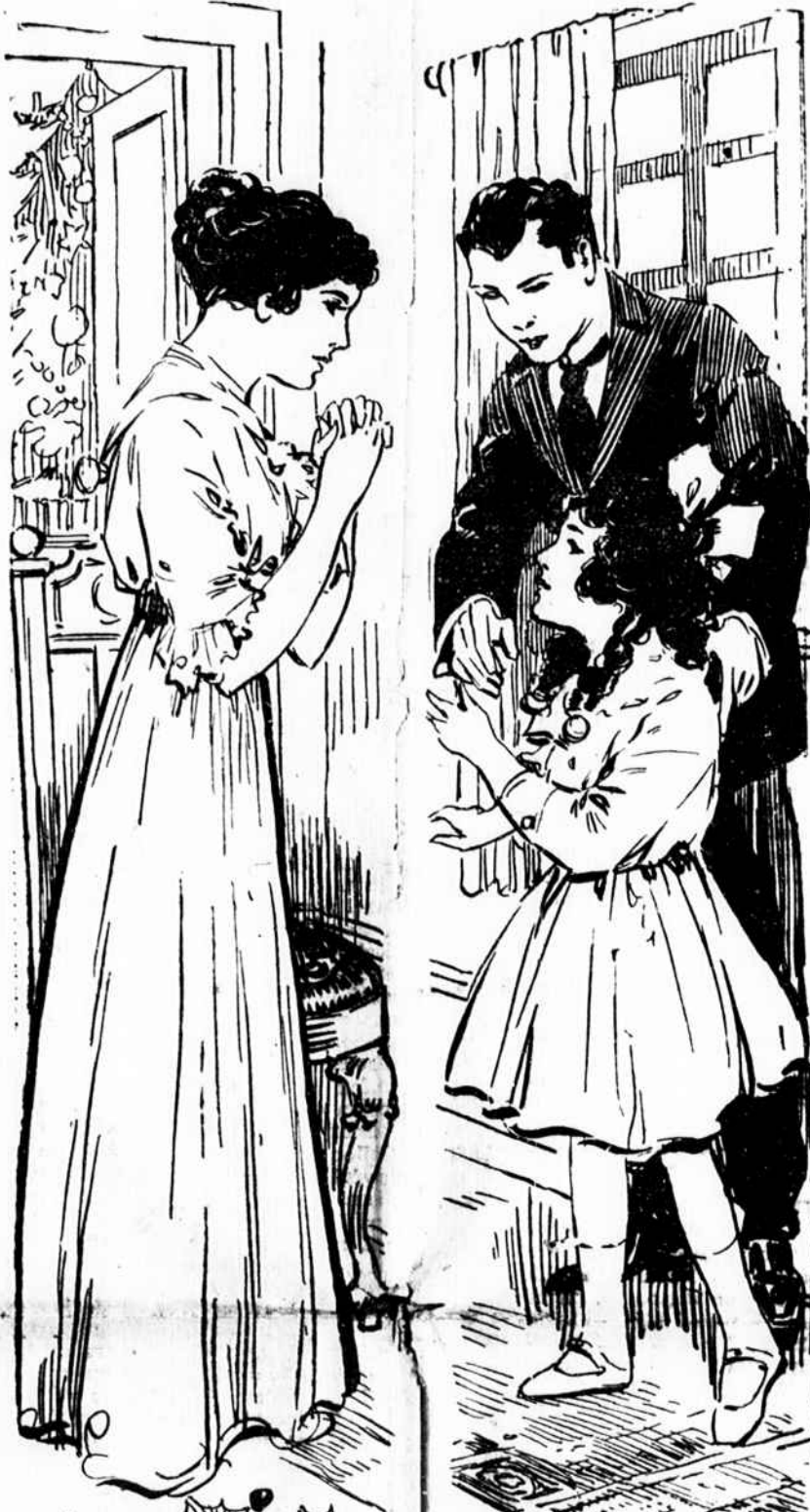
"Of course they care," the head nurse tried to comfort her.

"I wanted to send them a lot o' things," the child continued drearily, "but 'course I couldn't. So I sent each o' the boys a 'two for five' postcard. The man had some beautiful ones for 5 cents"—her face lighted up at the remembrance—"but I only had 10 cents, and that wouldn't 'a' left any for stamps."

Miss Morgan smiled sympathetically. It had not been many years since postcards and plenty of stamps had been a luxury to her.

"Are your brothers in trouble?" she asked abruptly, noticing a crumpled letter in the child's hand.

Ann's face darkened. "Yes; Sam's lost his job, and one o' George's babies is sick, and they can't pay my board here any longer, so I got to go home as soon's



my week's up, and that's day after tomorrow." She began sobbing again despairingly. "And it's so nice here," she wailed, "so much nicer 'n it'll be where I got to go."

"Where have you got to go?" questioned Miss Morgan wonderingly.

"Won't you live with your brothers?"

"Oh, no; I can't stay there! George's folks have got so many children, and Sam's wife is 'fraid o' me 'cause I cough—and—and"—she hesitated and buried her face in her hands, revealing the climax in a muffled voice—"they're goin' to send me to a home—a HOME!"

She paused a moment, then continued passionately. "And I'd work for 'em—I'd scrub or take care o' babies or anything—if they only wouldn't send me there!"

The head nurse drew Ann closer and smoothed her tumbled hair silently, comfortingly, until she became quiet.

"Ann was not a child to be comforted by the promise of a new toy. Her large dark eyes, too solemn by far for her years—seemed to say to the world that she had been robbed of her childish rights, and this little bit of 'loving' from the head nurse was the one thing of all things that she most needed. Exhausted by so much sobbing, she nestled down wearily under the soothing touch, and her lids began to droop.

"Come, dear," Miss Morgan said presently, half raising the child; "you must go to bed now and get rested. Tomorrow I'll come over to see you again."

As she passed through the hall, taking Ann back to the ward, she encountered the night nurse and Dr. Gray and asked them to wait a moment. She tucked Ann in snugly with a whispered "Good night, dear," and straightened her cap as she hurried back into the hall.

"Will any stores in the village be

Christmas morning, and they came in with a rush of happy anticipation, flocking around their tree and lovingly fingering the treasures.

The two watchers noticed Ann's somber face as she went slowly to her bed and began spreading it up. These joys were not for her. No one sent things to her. She was going to a home in a few days.

There was a commotion around the Christmas tree.

"Oh," a shrill little voice cried, "where did that beautiful doll come from? It wasn't here before!"

They all gathered around while she held it up.

"Why, it's for Ann Wetherly!" she exclaimed, looking at the slip pinned to the doll's sleeve. She ran over to Ann and held it out.

"Take it quick, Ann!" she cried.



Joysously. "It's for you!"

Ann dropped the blanket she was holding and stared incredulously. "For me?"

"Yes; see your name—plain as day!"

Ann's abandoned faith in Santa Claus began to return. She held out her arms for the doll.

"Oh, the (dear, beautiful dolly!" she cooed.

The two in the hall looked at each other and smiled happily. They watched the children as they crowded around the trees, examining the gifts and running back to Ann with each new treasure that bore her name. Ann sat on the bed, her dark eyes shone, and she gazed with delighted amazement at each offering.

"How little it takes to make a child happy!" Miss Ford murmured softly as she turned away. "I must go off to bed now." She went out, and Miss Morgan turned to the medicine closet. She had put it to rights and was jotting down a list of things needed when Dr. Gray burst in, his face alight.

"Oh, Gratitude," he cried joyfully. "It's come!"

"Sh!" Miss Morgan pointed a warning finger toward the ward, but the children were making too much noise themselves to heed anything else.

Dr. Gray pulled a letter out of his pocket.

"I got this letter from the board this morning. Dr. Williams has resigned, and they've offered me the position of superintendent—a hundred a month to begin with and everything furnished us!"

"What a beautiful Christmas gift!" she breathed softly, smiling at his confident "us."

"They want me to begin the first of the year. The superintendent's cottage will be vacant then. Do you suppose—would it be too soon?"

Miss Morgan's mind flew back over the two long years they had waited.

"I'll be ready," she murmured happily.



ply. "It's such a dear little cottage!"

He came closer with outstretched arms, but stopped abruptly as she pointed again to the half-open door.

"Hang it all!" he muttered. "I wish you weren't the head nurse!"

"We might go for a sleigh ride this afternoon," she suggested demurely. "Now, come on and peep in at Ann. She's so happy."

They went over to the door and looked in. Ann sat on the edge of her bed caressing the "dear, beautiful dolly." The two gazed at her silently; then suddenly Gratitude Morgan raised her eyes to the face beside her.

"Oh, Herbert, do you think 'could we'?"

Dr. Gray squared his broad shoulders. Her meaning came in a flash.

"Yes, we can, and we will if you want to. Of course," he hesitated—"maybe we couldn't have so many other things if we had her."

"No, but we'll have love, and it would be too bad not to give that little starved soul a share of it."

"Ann," Miss Morgan questioned abruptly, "how would you like to live with us for awhile?"

Ann looked from one to the other dazedly. "Live with you! Where? Oh, you're jokin'!" she said slowly.

"No; she means it," interjected Dr. Gray. "We're going to live in the superintendent's cottage."

"Oh, I see!" the child nodded wisely. "You two are goin' to get married. But nobody wants me—not even!"

Miss Morgan interrupted her bitterness. "Yes, we do want you," drawing the child to her, "and you're going to live with us, and when you get well enough you can go to school."

A change came over Ann's face. Flinging her arms around Miss Morgan, she breathed:

"What a wonderful, wonderful day! And to think that yesterday—I thought nobody cared!"



Morgan did not speak, but wrapped the blanket carefully around the little figure, and tears of sympathy for the lonely orphan filled her eyes.

The new nurse whom she had been forced to reprimand sternly that day for carelessness and neglect would have been amazed to see the "dignified head nurse" sitting on the floor with a child clasped in her arms, her cap awry and her soft hair mingling with Ann's tangled black locks. People seldom saw her professional dignity unbend as much as this. Only Dr. Gray, the young resident physician who was eagerly working and learning and waiting for the day when he could make a home for the "dearest girl in the world," would not have been astonished at the picture.

Gradually the child's sobbing ceased.

